

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7798
INFO AMEMBASSY PRETORIA
AMCONSUL CAPE TOWN
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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, PINS, SF
SUBJ: MULDER GIVES SOWETO CIVIC STATUS

REF: JOHANNESBURG 1209

1. SUMMARY: IN A MOVE CATCHING MANY BY SURPRISE,
MINISTER OF PLURAL AFFAIRS CONNIE MULDER ANNOUNCED
VIRTUALLY A FULL TRANSFER OF CIVIC POWERS AND DUTIES
FROM THE WEST RAND BOARD TO THE SOWETO COMMUNITY
COUNCIL (NOW TO BE CALLED THE SOWETO COUNCIL). THE
NEW POWERS, INCLUDING "LEGAL" STATUS, INCLUDE RESPONS-
SIBILITY FOR HOUSING, THE COMBATTING OF UNLAWFUL
OCCUPATION OF LAND AND BUILDINGS, ADMINISTRATION OF
SITES FOR CHURCHES, SCHOOLS AND TRADE, APPROVAL OF
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BUILDING PLANS, PROMOTION OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT, THE
BEAUTIFYING AND NEATNESS OF THE AREA, AND THE ESTAB-
LISHMENT OF A COMMUNITY GUARD. OF GREATEST INTEREST
IS THE FORMATION OF A COUNCIL TREASURY WITH THE RIGHT
TO OBTAIN LOANS. IN SHORT, MULDER HAS ACCEDED, AT
LEAST IN FORM, TO MOST OF THE DEMANDS FOR CIVIC SELF-
GOVERNMENT (BARRING TAX POWERS OR SUBVENTIONS) FROM THE

BLACK COMMUNITY, INCLUDING THOSE OF THE COMMITTEE OF TEN. END SUMMARY.

2. MINISTER OF PLURAL AFFAIRS, IN A MOVE OUTFLANKING THE COMMITTEE OF TEN, HAS GRANTED NEARLY FULL CIVIC STATUS TO THE SOWETO COMMUNITY COUNCIL. THE MOVE WOULD SHARPLY CURTAIL THE POWERS OF THE WEST RAND BOARD AS AN ADMINISTRATIVE ENTITY (AS MENTIONED REFTEL), WITH RESPECT TO SOWETO (BUT POSSIBLY NOT OTHER BLACK TOWNSHIPS), ALTHOUGH AS DAVID THEBAHALI (CHAIRMAN OF THE SOWETO COUNCIL) ADVISED US, WRAB PERSONNEL WILL PROBABLY BE SECONDED TO THE COUNCIL UNTIL SUCH TIME AS REPLACEMENT BLACKS CAN BE FOUND AND TRAINED.

3. WHILE THE TRANSFER OF POWERS IS VIRTUALLY ALL-INCLUSIVE, INCLUDING THE GRANTING OF MUNICIPAL STATUS FOR SOWETO (HERETOFORE ONLY AN ANCILLARY TOWNSHIP OF JOHANNESBURG), THERE ARE STILL SOME PROBLEMS AND CONCERNS TO BE NOTED. FOREMOST IS THE CREATION OF A COMMUNITY "POLICE FORCE" TO BE CALLED COMMUNITY GUARDS. THE GUARDS ARE APPARENTLY INTENDED TO BE A CONSTABULARY, ACTING IN CONCERT WITH THE SOUTH AFRICAN POLICE. MILITANTS, OF COURSE, SEE THIS AS MERELY ANOTHER DEVICE TO BE USED AGAINST THEM IN THE EVENT OF FUTURE DISTURBANCES. EVEN JAN VISSER, SOWETO COMMANDER OF POLICE, HAS LOOKED UPON SUCH A FORCE WITH SOME MISLIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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GIVING. CONNIE MULDER EMPHASIZED, HOWEVER, THAT THE COMMUNITY GUARDS WERE NOT MEANT TO BE CONNECTED IN ANY WAY WITH THE MAKOGTLA, THE TRIBAL SYSTEM OF POLICE AND JUSTICE THAT IS STILL FOUND THROUGHOUT MANY AREAS OF SOWETO. THE REASONING BEHIND MULDER'S INCLUSION OF A PROVISION FOR THE COMMUNITY GUARDS SEEMS TO BE THAT THERE IS A DESIRE FOR A BUFFER FORCE BETWEEN THE COMMUNITY AND THE SOUTH AFRICAN POLICE.

4. OF ADDITIONAL IMPORTANCE, AND ONE THAT THEBAHALI HIMSELF, IN PRIOR CONVERSATION, DOUBTED MULDER COULD GRANT, WAS THE CREATION OF A MUNICIPAL TREASURY WITH THE AUTHORITY TO RAISE LOANS. WHETHER ANYONE WILL LEND MONEY TO THE NEW MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT OF SOWETO UNLESS IT WERE TO BE GUARANTEED SOMEHOW BY THE SOUTH AFRICAN GOVERNMENT IS OPEN TO QUESTION, ALTHOUGH THEBAHALI CLAIMS HE HAS LINES OPEN TO FINANCIAL SOURCES IN THE U.S. PREPARED TO EXTEND HELP TO SOWETO. THE ANNOUNCEMENT MAKES NO REFERENCE TO TAX POWERS OR ADDITIONAL GOVERNMENT SUBVENTIONS FOR SOWETO.

5. COMMENT: MULDER'S ACTION WAS SO UNEXPECTED AND,

INDEED, SO SWEEPING THAT THERE IS BOUND TO BE A
WAVE OF SKEPTICISM OVER WHETHER THE TRANSFER OF
AUTHORITY IS JUST PUTTING A BLACK FACE ON THE WEST
RAND BOARD. THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT THE COMMUNITY
FUNCTIONS OF ADMINISTERING SOWETO WILL CONTINUE TO BE
FULFILLED BY THE WRAB FOR SOME TIME. NONETHELESS,
MULDER'S MOVE SEEMS TO REPRESENT A SIGNIFICANT ADVANCE.
WHERE THIS LEAVES THE COMMITTEE OF TEN IS ALSO OPEN
TO QUESTION. WHILE THEBAHALI HAS LITTLE CREDIBILITY,
HE HAS MADE A START AT "DELIVERING THE GOODS" AND
THIS CHANGE IS BOUND TO HAVE ITS EFFECT UPON TRADI-
TIONAL POLITICAL ALIGNMENTS IN SOWETO. THE TIMING OF
THE ANNOUNCEMENT IS OF INTEREST ITSELF, COMING AS IT
DID ONE WEEK BEFORE THE SECOND ANNIVERSARY OF THE
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SOWETO RIOTS ON JUNE 16, 1976.
JOHNSON

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